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## INTERROGATION, ARREST AND CONDEMNATION OF GERMAN PRISONERS OF WAR IN SOVIET RUSSIA

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REPORT ON INTERROGATION, ARREST AND CONDEMNATION  
OF GERMAN PRISONERS OF WAR IN SOVIET RUSSIA

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## FOREWORD

This study is the second of a series of three dealing with the experiences of German prisoners of the Russians. The first, entitled "The Secret of the Power of the Soviet State," was the detailed account of a German released in 1949. The third, written by a German medical officer, describes the physical, mental, and spiritual deterioration of the repatriated prisoners. The names of the author and reviewer are withheld.

*W. S. Nye*

W. S. NYE

Colonel, Artillery

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## P R E F A C E

According to its official statement of May 1950 the Soviet Union has concluded the repatriation of the German prisoners of war. The fate of hundreds of thousands of German soldiers is thereby left uncertain. The greater part of these men have succumbed from hunger, extremely heavy labor, mistreatment and physical and spiritual torment. They are silent forever and are buried somewhere in the endless expanses of Russia. However, their relatives continue to hope and will suffer until they have some positive knowledge. Another smaller number of them have "vanished," or have been "deported" or condemned to "silence." Among these latter are probably included all those who are not permitted to see the western world again because their knowledge of the Soviet system and the infinite number of crimes committed under it might perhaps be dangerous to Communism. An additional number have been condemned to severe penalties which probably none of them will survive, in view of their age and their physical and mental condition.

However, what is the condition of those who were condemned in the Soviet Union and are still alive? The evidence available to both the German government and the Western Powers is so clear and voluminous that probably nobody can doubt any longer that the Soviet Union has committed striking perversions of justice for political reasons. A number of separate reports, containing concrete statements, have called attention to these facts. The number of those condemned, some of them without a trial, without witnesses, without legal counsel, without the possibility of an appeal, cannot yet be ascertained. However, it must be considered relatively high. In order to save face, a few convicted defendants have been pardoned and permitted to return home. Perhaps more will be pardoned and released if the Western world adopts a resolute and energetic stand against these perversions of justice.

What can be the underlying purpose of these convictions? We believe it is the purpose of the Soviet leaders to spread fear and terror. They propose to bring about a paralysis of the will to resist by announcing: "Look -- this is what will happen to you if you fall into our hands!"

The German Reviewer

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REPORT ON INTERROGATION, ARREST AND CONDEMNATION  
OF GERMAN PRISONERS OF WAR IN SOVIET RUSSIA

I. During the Period Prior to 17 November 1949

From personal experience I am able to report on the interrogation of German prisoners by Russian officials only for the period between the capitulation and 17 November 1949. On this date I left Prisoner of War Camp No. 7270/3 for home.

I myself was interrogated only twice. As I had never been in Russia before, and as the officials who interrogated me were happily very decent men, I was treated with forbearance. The rest of my statements are based on concurrent information from reliable comrades about their experiences while being interrogated.

1. Interrogations

a. The Period of Time Involved. During our stay in PW Camp No. 58 in Mordvinia (I do not know its exact location) from 31 August 1945 until mid-January 1947, interrogations were carried on at only rare intervals and on a minor scale.

After our arrival in Camp No. 7270, in the vicinity of Borovichi, some 400 kilometers northwest of Moscow, there were at first also no interrogations.

It was not until the summer of 1948, as far as I remember, that interrogations were carried out more frequently. There was then already an impression that each prisoner was to be questioned at least once. Now and then the interrogations were discontinued, only to be resumed later, after which they were again discontinued. Nevertheless the opinion continued to prevail that every prisoner would be interrogated at least once.

Early in July 1949, to the best of my recollection, an interrogation commission arrived in the "Forest Camp" (No. 7270/16) situated about 30 kilometers southeast of Borovichi, which is approximately 400 kilometers northwest of Moscow, although I do not know the exact location of the camp. The commission, said to have consisted of

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some twelve persons, worked steadily from that time on until our transfer from the "Forest Camp" to the "City Camp" (No. 7270/3) where the interrogations were continued by a local commission. To the best of my knowledge, this commission was augmented after our arrival by members of the interrogation commission which had been operating in the "Forest Camp."

b. Subjects of Interrogations. The chief and ever-recurring subjects of interrogations were atrocities and war crimes; measures against partisans, Soviet prisoners of war and civilians; requisitions and demolitions.

aa. Atrocities and War Crimes. During nearly every interrogation the prisoners were questioned about atrocities and war crimes. They were asked whether they themselves pleaded guilty to such acts and whether they knew other members of the Wehrmacht having committed any. As far as I recall, in the spring of 1946 a general appeal was issued requesting every member of the German armed forces to inform Soviet authorities about atrocities and war crimes committed either by superiors, comrades or subordinates.

bb. The Fight Against Partisans. The question as to whether they had been engaged in fighting partisans was asked all prisoners who, by reason of their assignment, might have been involved. This was particularly the case with respect to members of headquarters, security units, units for special assignments and similar organizations.

I would like to mention the following example: In our camp there was a reserve major who, almost 60 years old, had been a battalion commander in a security regiment. During an engagement with partisans, which took place, as far as I remember, in 1944, he was captured after having been very seriously wounded in the leg. The partisans took him to one of their hospitals where he recovered. In the summer of 1949 he was repeatedly questioned in great detail about his unit's fighting against the partisans. After the conclusion of the interrogations he was shipped out together with a few other individuals classified as "suspects" ("Belastete"). No one in the camp doubted that he would be tried because his unit had fought the partisans, nor was there any doubt that he would be sentenced to severe punishment of from five to twenty-five years at hard labor. Yet we were convinced that the partisans would not have nursed him back to health if either he or his unit had committed even the slightest illegal act.

cc. Measures Against Russian Prisoners of War. The interrogations investigating mistreatment of, and other illegal measures against Russian prisoners of war were conducted in a similar manner as the interrogations concerning the fighting against partisans. All Germans who might possibly have come in contact with Russian prisoners were interrogated.

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dd. Measures Against Civilians. The Russians considered deportation and pillage the main crimes against the civilian population. They interrogated, therefore, all prisoners presumed to have had dealings with civilians, such as military government personnel, interpreters, and those who in any way, even though remotely, had anything to do with transportation. The term deportation covered a multitude of acts, such as, for instance, evacuations, even though they had been ordered to safeguard civilians in the combat zone; eviction of civilians to make room for German troops in overcrowded towns; and requisitioning of civilian property. These and similar measures were the subjects of interrogations.

Subject to interrogations on these counts were town (garrison) commanders, transportation officers, railroad station commanders, members of truck convoys, railway engineers, military police patrols, and others. But the Russians also interrogated in this connection some quartermasters, deputy chiefs of staff, as well as the chiefs of staff of corps and army headquarters.

In illustration of interrogation subjects I wish to mention the case of an Oberstabsarzt (major, Medical Corps) who had, for some time, been the chief surgeon of a German field hospital. For potato peeling and similar work he had employed Russian women and girls who had volunteered for the sake of the meals they received. When voluntary applications for work as domestics in Germany were being accepted two of the girls employed in the hospital applied. Because of the interest shown by the chief surgeon, the girls found good positions with German families, one of them in his own house. Through an uncautious remark of his in camp the Russian officials heard about this, with the result that he was repeatedly interrogated, and ordered to immediately inquire from his wife for the name of the girl. In the meantime I have learned that after 17 November 1949 this surgeon had also been arrested and that he was sentenced to twenty-five years at hard labor for the deportation of Russian civilians. The court did not consider it an extenuating circumstance that the physician had personally saved the lives of several Russian women in difficult deliveries in his hospital.

ee. Requisitions. Requisitions were for weeks the main subject of interrogations during the summer of 1948. The Russians not only questioned administrative officers, veterinarians, paymasters and enlisted men from the supply service, but also commanders of field forces, officers and enlisted men of the field forces. They were asked: "Where did your unit get its food?" The answer that "We drew it from our ration distribution point" was not sufficient for the interrogation officers. They asserted that the ration distributing points had requisitioned the food, and that it had been the duty of each commander to inform himself from where the distribution point had received its supplies.

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Several of my comrades were asked where they had been billeted in Russia. If they answered that their billets had been earthen bunkers in the field, they were asked where they had taken the timber needed for the roof. If they replied, from the woods, they were charged with the illegal removal of Soviet government property. If they said they had taken the wood from a nearby, destroyed and evacuated village, they were charged with looting.

Although I cannot vouch for it, the following tale is very likely true, as I heard it from different people. An enlisted man, asked whether the food he had received had not been monotonous, replied "No." Thereupon the interrogation officer insinuated that, "Surely a chicken occasionally flew into your kit?" Admitting that this happened just once, the soldier was reportedly given a severe prison term for looting which, if I remember correctly, was for twenty-five years at hard labor.

Identical interrogation methods were applied with regard to all sorts of items, such as timber used to build field fortifications, fuel wood, furniture taken from evacuated villages, and so forth.

ff. Demolitions. Engineer troops, construction and railway engineer soldiers, and members of similar organizations were interrogated about demolitions.

A colonel in the engineers, who had been a Korpspionier-fuehrer,\* was interrogated about the destruction of bridges during a retrograde movement. Repeated interrogations attempted to determine who was responsible for ordering the demolition of the bridges. The engineer commander stated that such an order could only have been given by the commanding general, who was not a prisoner of the Russians and who was then in West Germany. When the chief of staff of this corps headquarters who was in the same camp, was questioned, he confirmed this. After numerous cross-examinations the engineer commander finally admitted that he had cooperated in drawing up the order for demolishing the bridge. Thereupon the interrogation officer told him that he need not worry about admitting his share in giving the order for demolishing the bridge, since such a measure was not a punishable act when undertaken during combat. I have since learned that after my departure on 17 November 1949, the engineer commander was sentenced to a term of twenty-five years at hard labor for demolishing the bridge.

A particular type of demolition was that of factories, railways, and so forth, responsibility for which the Russians repeatedly tried

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\* Special staff engineer officer and engineer commander at corps headquarters.

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to place on engineer troops, railway and construction engineer troops and members of similar units. According to statements made by engineer officers, which as far as I know are correct, such demolitions were carried out by special units who were not responsible to engineer officers. Consequently, neither the engineer commander at corps nor at any other level had any control over these special units.

gg. Spies. All prisoners formerly engaged in intelligence or similar matters were searchingly questioned. The Russians persisted in trying to prove that they had been spies. This applied primarily to intelligence officers /G-2/ and all those who worked with them, as well as to all radio intelligence personnel.

As far as was known in our camp, according to Soviet law, anyone who gathers information about Russia inside its borders is guilty of espionage. The same code applied to those who asked a captured Russian for more than his name and troop unit. It applied also to intelligence officers, and similar officers, although they are authorized by international law to gather information concerning the enemy.

It was also characteristic that every prisoner who had ever made a trip abroad, even though it had taken place years before the war, was asked what his mission was. The interrogation officers were unable to comprehend that any person might travel in foreign countries for pleasure or on private business. They were convinced that anyone who went abroad must have been given an espionage mission by his government. Although it was asked only a few times, the question as to who a person's escort might have been was even more characteristic. The interrogation officers could not be persuaded that it was possible for an individual to travel abroad without having a government-appointed escort to watch over him.

c. Interrogation Tactics.

aa. Uncertainty About the Person Concerned. During all interrogations the person questioned was at first left in the dark about the individual against whom the proceedings were directed. These might be directed against himself, a comrade in the same camp, or against someone else in another prisoner of war camp.

bb. Uncertainty About the Object of the Investigation. An attempt was also made to disguise the object of the investigation as much as possible. Shrewd investigating officers knew how to keep the person interrogated in ignorance of the object under investigation during most of the hearings.

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cc. Interrogation Personnel. We were amazed at the extremely low mental level and the utterly defective military training of the interrogation officers. Most of them were trained to ask only a few routine questions, such as those designed to determine identity of unit. When these questions could not be answered because a man's unit would in no ways fit the line of questioning (if, for instance, it was a Wehrmacht signal headquarters) the interrogators more or less lost their bearings, became uncertain of themselves, and finally obstinately insisted that the question should be answered as asked, which was simply impossible.

The linguistic abilities of the interpreters were just as inadequate. They were mostly girls who, like the interrogation officers, were trained only to ask specific questions. On matters which diverged from the usual subjects of interrogations they lacked not only the necessary vocabulary but even an understanding of the terms in their own mother tongue.

On the two occasions I was interrogated in Camp 7270 the following occurred. I stated that my duties as signal communications commander (Nachrichtenkommandant) had been to maintain liaison between the Wehrmacht and the Reichspost (German Mail Service). The term Reichspost had twice been entered in the transcript. When it was mentioned for the third time, I was finally asked: "What does Reichspost mean?" After protracted discussions I succeeded in explaining the word. However, instead of Reichspost (German Mail Service) the designation "State Administration of Telegraphs and Telephones" twice appeared in the transcript. Heeresnachrichtenzeugamt Berlin ("Army Signal Procurement Office Berlin") appeared in the transcript taken down during the same interrogation as "Army Telephone Office Berlin."

I was repeatedly asked what was meant by "liaison" between Wehrmacht and Reichspost. I doubt whether I succeeded, in spite of long drawn out explanations, in making the woman interpreter and the interrogation officer understand this term. Upon mentioning my assignment in 1941 to the staff of the army senior signal officer under Army Headquarters LIST, they wanted to put down in the transcript that I had been the commanding general of Army Headquarters LIST. It sounds like a joke but it is the bitter truth, that I was able to prevent the recording of this error only after repeated remonstrating. By using pantomime and the few German words which the interrogation officer apparently understood, I was finally able to make it clear that Feldmarschall LIST, as a very great man, had been on a chair, while I, as a very insignificant fellow, had been under his chair.

It is self-evident that in this manner the most serious harm can befall an individual who does not immediately realize and protest the recording of false statements in the transcript. During

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subsequent interrogations or at a trial he is simply confronted with his transcribed statement. He is accused of being a liar and thus loses all chance of ever being believed by the Russians.

dd. Questions. The questions asked were almost always vague. Usually the person interrogated did not know what they meant. In the majority of cases the questions undoubtedly were intended to be vague, but to a lesser extent this was due to an ignorance of the subject matter and incompetent interpreting. An attempt also was always made to induce the person interrogated to talk as much as possible, whereupon the interrogation officers would try, especially if they were unfamiliar with the topic, to set a trap for him through additional questions, to find contradictions and thus to confuse and bewilder him. It was clear that most interrogation officers were anxious to prove the person before them to be a liar or a criminal.

A similar procedure was followed when a prisoner was ordered to write a report on a specific topic. After some length of time he was either interrogated about it or requested to write a second report on the same subject. Any inconsistency between the two reports or between the report and the interrogation was then construed as a contradiction or a lie.

The experience I had during one of my interrogations will serve as an example of how such contradictions were fabricated: I had stated previously that one of my duties as signal communications commander was to negotiate the procurement with auxiliary Wehrmacht personnel for the repair of major breakdowns in the Reichspost communication system, such as occurred, for instance, after air attacks. After a while I was asked: "What type of personnel worked in your office?" I replied: "A few officers and officials, as well as civilians, most of them women." I was then told this was wrong for, according to previous statements, I had provided auxiliary personnel to the Reichspost for the repair of major breakdowns. The matter was clarified only after energetic insistence that what I really had said was that I had acted as an intermediary to obtain personnel for the Reichspost, in other words, in each individual case I had applied to the military area headquarters or to the air force administrative command headquarters for the transfer of needed personnel to the Reichspost.

Another method of extracting information was "bluffing." Once I was asked, for instance: "When were you with the Freikorps?"\* Since I had never served in any such organization I was at first

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\*Volunteer corps [often formed in Germany, in 1918, to fight communism and bolshevism].

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puzzled about the meaning of the question. It was not until I had energetically disclaimed any such connection and rejected very persistent repetitions of the same question that this point was finally dropped. The second question was: "When were you in Borislav?" (I am not certain whether I understood the name correctly.) I was able to immediately refute this question by pointing out that I had never once been in Russia during the whole war.

Cases of mistaken identity also play an important part during the investigations. For instance, I was once questioned about a certain General Liegmann. I declared that I did not know him either by name or personally. I then was told: "The general gave your name as a witness, consequently you must know him." When I again denied this I was told: "General Liegmann gave us your surname and first name, your father's name and the date of your birth, therefore you must know him!" When I said that the general could not possibly know all this because neither the first name nor the father's name was ever used officially in the German Army it did not help matters. They claimed this information was contained in the questionnaire received from the general and that it was therefore evident that he must have given it.

Only gradually by referring to statements I had already made in 1945 - 46 concerning my wartime assignments as recorded in my personnel file, did I succeed in convincing the Russians of my veracity. I further pointed out that some Soviet agency apparently had copied my personnel data from the Moscow central prisoner of war locator file, and that there probably existed a second Colonel Halder, inasmuch as a colleague had once asked me about him. The female interpreter and the interrogation officer immediately plied me with questions about the identity of this second Colonel Halder and asked who had mentioned him to me. I replied that this conversation had taken place several years ago in Camp No. 58/6.

Another case is that of Major der Reserve (reserve major) Hahnebutt (I am not sure about the spelling of his name, in civilian life he had been a Forstmeister\* in the Harz Mountains). For three weeks he was held in solitary confinement and for several weeks he was subjected to grueling interrogations, in order to collect evidence to show that during the war he had committed a crime in Russia. A short time later, Major Hahnebutt was shipped from camp alone. Subsequently we learned that in the area in question not this Major Hahnebutt but another officer bearing the same name had allegedly committed war crimes. Since after eighteen months we heard from Germany that our comrade Hahnebutt had neither returned nor sent mail, it is to be feared that he was condemned.

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\*Forestry master (administrative functionary for forestry).

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An honorable East Prussian farmer, who worked in a camp shop was, upon order of the interrogation commission, suddenly relieved of his job and forbidden to leave the camp. He was interrogated time and again because the investigating officers wanted to prove that he was a colonel in disguise. The fact is that more than a year previously, the Russians had repatriated a colonel bearing the same name as the farmer.

Even more serious was the following case of mistaken identity: Dr. Bettenhaeuser, a divisional administrative officer, had been charged with the requisitioning of furnishings or similar items in a Russian city, although he had never been in the area where the incident supposedly had taken place. He succeeded in informing his relatives about the charges. A namesake, who had carried out the requisition upon official orders, and who had long since been repatriated to West Germany, thereupon furnished an affidavit before a German notary public to the effect that he was the Bettenhaeuser sought by the Russians. The relatives intended to send the affidavit to Soviet authorities in order to exonerate the falsely accused Dr. Bettenhaeuser. Since I have heard nothing about the outcome of this measure until now, I surmise that it proved unsuccessful.

In the course of an investigation the interrogation officer was informed that the accused party he was looking for had been sent home a long time ago. He replied that it was too bad for the man responsible for letting him go. It is therefore likely that the investigating officers, for their own protection, substitute the prisoners still available for accused namesakes who have been repatriated.

Another method used by interrogators is to belittle the importance of a question. Either they say: "You may as well admit it, because the question does not involve you," or they pretend that the question is utterly unimportant. For instance, an engineer commander was told that he would not be held criminally responsible if he had ordered the demolition of a bridge during combat for tactical reasons. As far as known, a few months later he was sentenced to twenty-five years at hard labor.

A military police officer, accused of murdering Russian prisoners of war, named as defense witness a general staff (division operations) officer. The latter happened to remember the incident and was able to absolve the military police officer in the course of two interrogations. Subsequently he himself was accused and thrown into jail. One of the charges was that he had been "present" during the interrogation of Soviet prisoners of war.

By way of contrast, the interrogators made every effort to exclude favorable testimony from the record. A field grade officer

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was questioned as a witness about matters concerning his former commander. He exonerated the commander and also mentioned the social measures the latter had initiated in favor of Russian civilians during quiet periods. The interrogating officer incredulously replied that this general must have been an angel.

ee. Physical Mistreatment. Interrogation officers repeatedly mistreated prisoners who refused to give testimony which, though contrary to the facts, was needed as incriminating evidence. From among a number of such cases I have personal knowledge of the following two:

An interrogation officer slapped a major and gave a divisional administrative officer a blow on the chin. Both these incidents took place during the summer of 1949 in the "Forest Camp" (No. 7270/16). Before such acts of mistreatment occurred, the woman interpreter was sent from the room in order not to have a witness present.

Prisoners who refused to make statements as desired were in numerous cases thrown into the "dungeon" where they received, depending on the interrogation officer's whim, either their regular officer rations or the very substantial cut in food prescribed for men under arrest. Frequently the dungeons are half under the ground. The windows could be opened, and some of the rooms had neither flooring, chairs nor beds. Since most "dungeons" were built of wood, the rooms were very damp and greatly overcrowded whenever a great many interrogations took place at the same time. But even in overcrowded rooms the only toilet facility available for six to eight men was a single bucket which was emptied in the morning and evening.

No washing facilities were available even for prisoners who had to stay in the dungeon for several weeks. The guard normally brought in food in the morning and often not again until late at night. The "dungeon" in the "Forest Camp" was completely cut off from the outside world so that no aid whatever could be summoned in case of heart attacks or other cases of sudden sickness.

In the summer of 1949 I was in the "Forest Camp" (No. 7270/16). There I heard from reliable sources the details of the following incidents. As the result of an investigation a certain field grade officer had been thrown into the "dungeon." After three weeks he was released due to the efforts of the very clever German camp administration. It had been possible to do this only because the interrogation officer who ordered the incarceration was away on a trip. However, as a result it was found that the latter had entirely forgotten the officer and because of this had not ordered his release from the "dungeon" before going away.

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ff. Transcripts. Written in Russian, the interrogation transcripts were not only characterized by the incompetence of the interrogation officer and the women interpreter but occasionally malevolence played a part in their preparation. It was reliably reported by the few Russian-speaking comrades that a certain interrogation officer was constantly quarreling with his woman interpreter during interrogations. He accused her of writing sheer nonsense and of being unable to write correct Russian. She had retorted that her mistakes were due to the fact that he was too stupid to interrogate correctly.

Since the transcript was written in Russian, the prisoner had no opportunity to verify its contents. There was said to be a regulation which provides that, upon request, a German translation must be made and that it may be signed by the prisoner in question. In practice, this regulation was ignored, because there was never enough time to translate the transcripts into German. The interrogations proceeded at such a slow and interminable pace that no prisoner demanded a written translation for fear of delaying his early repatriation.

I was reliably told that during the summer of 1949 a prisoner stationed in the "Forest Camp" (No. 7270/16) had insisted on a written translation, whereupon he was immediately thrown into the "dungeon." When he nevertheless persisted the Russians were greatly embarrassed. After a great deal of argument it was agreed that he should give up his demand for a written translation and that instead the transcript would be read to him in German by two German field grade officers acting as interpreters. After this was done he signed the Russian transcript.

Trustworthy comrades told of other instances where prisoners had discovered distorting errors in the transcript, either because they could read Russian, or because the woman interpreter reread the contents in German. The errors were generally of such a nature as to incriminate the prisoner.

During one of my interrogations the woman interpreter was unwilling to read the transcript to me in German until I energetically insisted on it. She remarked that, since everything was accurate anyway, a reading was unnecessary. There is no doubt that a regulation exists which provides for the reading of the transcript in German, because the individual interrogated as well as the interpreter must sign a clause at the end of the transcript affirming that it has been read to him.

It is self evident that for the person interrogated there is great danger that in signing a transcript such as this he may unwittingly be accusing himself of crimes he never committed.

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gg. Confrontations. Interrogators laid great stress on having statements corroborated by the testimony of other prisoners in the camp. In the course of each investigation a call was therefore sent out for witnesses who then were questioned on the same points.

It was known in camp that whenever incriminating evidence against a prisoner was produced by Russian witnesses, the accused and the witnesses would be brought face to face.

The story that many witnesses implicated prisoners in order to protect themselves from punishment by the Soviet authorities is probably true. The following tale, circulated in camp, was therefore widely believed.

A German town (garrison) commander had been accused of certain war crimes by a Russian woman who had formerly worked as interpreter in his military government office. During a confrontation, she weepingly repeated her charges, although the officer had not committed the crime of which he was accused nor indeed any other crimes or offenses. There was no doubt but that the woman was not motivated by revenge, and that the reason for her action was solely a hope of mitigating the punishment threatening her for collaboration with the enemy.

Another former town (garrison) commander told me of the following incident immediately after it took place. He had also been accused of some sort of crime or offense, although he did not know by whom. The German field grade officer was taken by car to the "Sand Camp" (I do not remember its number; it is located about eight kilometers southeast of the "City Camp," No. 7270/3). Here in an office he was confronted with the former Russian mayor with whom he had worked when he was town commander. The mayor was serving out his punishment in the "Sand Camp," presumably for collaboration with the enemy. It was lucky for the field grade officer that the mayor was in the near-by "Sand Camp," otherwise he would most likely have been sent "Via individual shipment" to the place where he had acted as town (garrison) commander during the war, and thus would have vanished from view. During the confrontation in the "Sand Camp," the Russians tried in no way to influence the testimony of the mayor. The officer in question stressed this point. The result of the confrontation was his complete exoneration.

d. Mail. Mail service with our families in Germany was irregular. After we had been transferred from the "City Camp," (No. 7270/3) to the "Forest Camp," (No. 7270/16) in March 1949, if I remember correctly, we received even less mail. The deterioration was ascribed by the camp inmates to the laziness of the Russian woman interpreter responsible for censorship. The arrival of the interrogation commission in the "Forest Camp" (No. 7270/16) affected the delivery of

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mail to such a degree that it was an exaggeration to speak about the existence of mail contacts with Germany. Only a fraction of the mail addressed to us was delivered. Moreover, only a few relatives of camp inmates received the post cards which were mailed to them during the period from April to September. The prisoners had the impression that, for certain reasons not made known to them, they had been cut off from the outside world.

## 2. Transfers of Prisoners

a. From the Barracks. Prisoners were repeatedly shipped from camp. In such cases the individual concerned received the order to prepare himself to leave. This order often came many hours, and usually even days, prior to the time of departure. Instances occurred, however, when men were highly surprised because they received sudden orders to get ready to leave immediately. In such cases they were hardly given enough time to pack their belongings. I myself know of cases when men were forbidden to talk to their comrades again before leaving. While they packed their belongings a Russian officer would be present and urge them to make haste. It was difficult to pack because orders to leave almost always came at night so that the packing had to be done by very poor light. The prisoners of course never had an opportunity to ask for any items they might have lent to comrades. Articles overlooked in packing could not be forwarded and thus were lost forever. In all such cases the prisoners had to wait at the gate for a long time before they actually left the camp. We heard subsequently that these prisoners were not accused of serious crimes but were merely being sent from the "Forest Camp," (No. 7270/16) to the "City Camp" (No. 7270/3) in order to be interrogated.

They were never told their destination in advance. From the amount of food taken along, however, they could guess the length of the journey.

b. From the Dungeon. Transfers from the dungeon were usually carried out in an inconspicuous manner either early in the morning or late at night. The names of the men shipped out were generally not learned in camp until some time later and thus only by roundabout channels. Shipment from the dungeon was as a rule tantamount to an impending trial and conviction.

## 3. Trials

Since I had never been present at a trial, I can merely retell the experience of colleagues who appeared in one as witnesses. The individuals sentenced are never, and the witnesses hardly ever, returned to their former camps.

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From the concurring reports of several trustworthy colleagues I have gained these impressions.

The trial witnesses are carefully and systematically rehearsed. For this purpose they are taken from camp and put into a prison cell where they are completely removed from contact both with former comrades and Russians. Time and again they are called for interrogation, frequently in the middle of the night. During these interrogations they are repeatedly asked the same questions over and over again. Gradually, by a process of suggestion, they are taught what they are to say in open court. Whenever they say anything which the Russians do not want them to say in court, they are told over and over again that that is immaterial. On the other hand, they are time and again told that: "So far you have testified that..."

Usually only the prosecution witnesses were heard during the proceedings, and rarely the available defense witnesses. Examination of the latter was rejected in somewhat the following words: "No more witnesses are required as the amount of testimony heard is entirely sufficient."

I do not believe the assertion, however, that at certain trials the prosecutor, judge and defense counsel were one and the same person. I do not know whether this is also the case in criminal proceedings. The assertion was allegedly taken from a serious Russian publication of an informative character.

#### 4. Sentences

Only rarely was it possible to learn anything about the sentences passed on prisoners. This was due to the fact that witnesses were not present when the sentence was pronounced. They had always already been returned to solitary confinement. The condemned were also immediately after the sentence had been passed, marched back to solitary confinement. They were never returned to their former camp. Consequently, they had no opportunity to inform their comrades. Only in exceptional instances did they meet, while en route, some German comrades to whom they then shouted their names and their sentence. In this way those remaining in camp heard news about their condemned friends and this gave them an opportunity to inform their relatives.

#### 5. Execution of Sentences

It was impossible for me to learn anything definite about the execution of sentences. According to press reports and the information received from comrades I have a definite impression that the condemned were no longer treated as prisoners of war but rather

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as Russian convicts. All their property and also all their clothing was said to have been taken from them. Even though this property is downright worthless according to European standards, to a prisoner it nevertheless represents a very valuable aid in relieving the terrible hardship of Russian captivity. As an illustration of how prisoners estimated trifles, I would like to mention that, during a walk after my repatriation, I found myself wanting to pick up an empty but new food can, because such a can is valuable for a prisoner. It is further reported that instead of their own clothing the German convicts get Russian clothing, that is to say, a single suit of dirty rags.

Furthermore, the convicts no longer receive even the rations of the Soviet Army, not to mention officers' rations. They are fed convicts' rations which allegedly are smaller than those of the civilian population. The rations of civilians are smaller than those supplied the Red Army.

Since they no longer have the status of prisoners of war, all mail contacts with home are cut off.

The sentences are reportedly carried out in such a manner that one, or at most a few convicted German prisoners are sent to a Russian penal camp where they have to live among convicted Russians. What tortures such a life means can be imagined only by someone who had spent years in Russian captivity. We all knew it to be an absolutely reliable fact that the convicts -- and some prisoners of war who had never been sentenced to any punishment whatsoever were treated in a similar manner -- were driven on to perform the heaviest kind of labor while having to subsist on entirely inadequate rations and had to live in the worst kind of quarters. Whenever a prisoner became so weak as to be absolutely unfit for work -- the official Russian term for it is "O.K.," whose meaning we were never able to find out -- he was sent to a recuperation camp. By means of adequate meals, and because he is not detailed to any work or only for a short time to the lightest sort of work, the prisoner is "fattened up." As soon as he has recuperated, he was again shipped from the recuperation camp to the work camp where he was once more weakened until he reached the "O.K." condition. It may be assumed that, as a rule, a prisoner became physically exhausted four times a year and that he was fattened up as many times.

As an example of the treatment meted out to Russian convicts I would like to mention that in the spring of 1949 the "Sand Camp" (as far as I remember No. 7270/5) was occupied by Russian convicts. Their number was by far greater than the camp's capacity. The barracks, consequently, could not hold all the prisoners although they were packed terribly close together. A large number of them

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had to live in the open air, without a roof over their heads or even a board underneath them. They had no protection whatever during rainfalls. According to reliable sources, the condition persisted not merely for a short period but for quite some time. I myself saw the overcrowded conditions in this camp when we passed it on a march.

6. Number of Persons Concerned

a. At Interrogations. Probably every prisoner of war without exception was interrogated. However, the frequency, length and type of interrogation varied greatly. Whereas prisoners who appeared of no interest to the Russians were hardly troubled, those who seemed to possess information were subjected to repeated questionings of the most harrassing nature.

b. Shipments. I am unable to state the number of prisoners shipped from our camps, either as witnesses or as defendants, because in the summer of 1948 I had to burn the diary I had carefully kept in order to protect myself.

c. Convicts. Due to the aforementioned reason I also cannot give the number of convicts.

7. Categories Affected

It was impossible to gain a clear picture about the categories subjected to interrogations, inasmuch as their composition varied. However, approximately the following categories were interrogated:

General staff officers  
Members of the Ic Branch /Intelligence/  
Engineer troops  
Administrative officers  
Judges

Occasionally the interrogations were also carried out in such a manner that all former members of any one headquarters or of any one unit present in camp were questioned about the identical subject, generally for the purpose of collecting incriminating evidence against a specific individual. This was the case, for instance, with all officers assigned to the headquarters of General der Gebirgstruppen Le Suire.

8. Purpose

It was impossible for prisoners to obtain a clear picture of the purpose of the interrogations and sentences. They all agreed, however, that either one, several, or all of the following reasons may have accounted for these measures:

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- a. Revenge on the vanquished enemy.
- b. Procurement of voluminous material on war crimes, in order subsequently to make counterclaims should Germany demand reparations for atrocities perpetrated by Russians in East Prussia, Silesia, and elsewhere.
- c. Strengthening the spirit of the partisans in Russia by demonstrating to the civilian population that all Germans who had carried out measures against the partisans, even though these measures were entirely legal according to international law, had been punished.
- d. Intimidation of the Russian population by means of a demonstration showing that all those who had collaborated with the invader were punished, and that the long arm of retributive justice reached every offender, even if after a long interval.
- e. The desire to have a basis for bargaining. From Russian newspapers read to us we learned that the Soviets greatly desired to lay hands on Russian emigrés, whom they described as "pitiful deportees." This applies particularly to former members of the "Vlassov Army," whom they hated.

It is also possible that the prisoners were to be used in a bargain for political objective. We were convinced, at any rate, that our repatriation had been repeatedly delayed because of a political situation considered unfavorable by the Soviets.

f. The desire to keep anti-Communist elements away from Germany. I do not believe the Soviets deceive themselves about the fact that prisoners who have been held in Russia for many years hate Communism, and might become obstacles to the further evolution of Communism in the Eastern Zone. A remark made by a political indoctrination officer and circulated by reliable sources during the winter of 1948 - 49 in the "City Camp" (No. 7270/3), may be of interest in this connection: "A shipment of prisoners of war arriving from Russia in Germany tears down more in political reconstruction work than the entire SED party can rebuild in a whole year." If I remember correctly, as early as in November 1948, we prisoners suspected that the German Communists were conniving with the Russians concerning a further delay in our repatriation. We attached significance to a statement made by a leading SED member which was circulated among prisoners in Russia. The statement read approximately as follows:

"On the occasion of a visit by leading Eastern Zone politicians (whose names were mentioned) to Moscow, the prisoner of war problem was also discussed. The Soviet Foreign Minister declared that this problem would soon be solved satisfactorily."

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We immediately asked ourselves: "What does 'soon' mean in Russia? And 'satisfactorily' to whom? Does this mean to the satisfaction of the Russians or to the satisfaction of the SED?" The extension, from 31 December 1948 to 31 December 1949, of the final date set for the repatriation of all prisoners of war in the Soviet Union was considered by the majority as a confirmation of their suspicion that the SED had suggested this delay.

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II. The Period from 18 November to 22 December 1949

After the departure of our repatriation train I learned about what happened in the "City Camp" (No. 7270/3) through letters I wrote to several reliable field grade officers who left the camp on 22 December 1949 with the last shipment of which I know. For several hours, during his visit here in Bayreuth, I also had an opportunity to talk with a very dependable reserve major whom I used to know, about the events which took place in the "City Camp" (No. 7270/3) after my departure on 17 November 1949.

On the basis of these inquiries I gained the following impressions:

1. Interrogations

a. Chronological Order of Events. The wave of arrests — popularly known as "dungeon with packed luggage" — which had reached an unprecedented volume before we left on 16 November, increased considerably after our departure. The initial preparations for the impending arrests had been personally observed by a large number of my fellow repatriates. To begin with, alterations were made in one of the two hospital barracks in the camp by putting bars on windows, which transformed it into a "dungeon barracks." This work was rapidly finished after our departure. The hospital barracks was transformed into a dungeon barracks and separated from the rest of the camp by a barbed wire fence.

The wave of arrests decreased toward the end of November. The interrogations were gradually discontinued and the numerous investigation personnel disappeared. Left over were two young interrogation officers who apparently were to work on unfinished odds and ends of which in Russia there are always some in every line of endeavor.

It was rumored that another shipment of prisoners of war was to leave on or about 3 December. This rumor gained weight following an unusual semi-official statement made by political indoctrination officers before our departure. According to this statement, the rest of the camp inmates were to be sent home eight to ten days after our departure. It is a well-known fact that the Russians allow themselves a great deal of latitude in observing deadlines. This statement could thus have been regarded as a confirmation of the rumor about the repatriation shipment to leave on 3 December. I was told as a

matter of fact that the list of repatriates for this shipment was already in the camp, but that its publication had been delayed time and again. From the foregoing it may therefore safely be assumed that a repatriation shipment was actually planned to leave some time between 1 and 10 December.

It was a complete surprise when early in December an interrogation commission of unprecedented size, numbering 32 men, arrived in the "City Camp" (No. 7270/3). The interrogations began all over again, with a zeal hitherto unknown. They took place in a Russian administration building located outside the camp, and in a hospital room, as well as in barracks No. 4 which formerly had housed prisoners. The arrests now reached proportions which exceeded even the November figures. The dungeon, that is to say, the two dungeon barracks, most of the time held about 150 German prisoners, whereas before my departure the average number was about thirty-four. A short time after 17 November 1949, 154 field grade officers were suddenly photographed.

b. Interrogations and Interrogation Methods. Interrogations and interrogation methods remained unchanged; they have been described in the first part of this report.

## 2. Repatriation Shipments

Shipments were also continued in the same manner as described in the first part of this report.

## 3. Court Procedures

Nothing became known about court procedures after our departure on 17 November.

## 4. Sentences

Some of the sentences passed on their comrades became known to the prisoners remaining in camp. Most of them were for twenty-five years at hard labor. The sentences were passed for crimes which likewise have been described in the first part of this report, and which included atrocities, fighting against partisans, measures against civilians, mistreatment of Russian PWs, requisitions and similar crimes.

## 5. Execution of Sentences

It is not impossible that in the meantime there has been a change in the manner of executing sentences as compared with the methods depicted in the first part of this report. A reliable field grade officer told me after his return that German soldiers were

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assembled in the "Shaft Camp" ("Schachtlager"). I do not know the number of this camp; it is part of the area of Camp No. 7270 and like the "City Camp" it is located near Borovichi. Who these German soldiers were did not become known in the "City Camp" (No. 7270/3) although it was believed possible that they were comrades who had been convicted. But this does not necessarily indicate a change in the manner of executing sentences, for it is possible that the convicts, if such they are, were merely collected in the "Shaft Camp" in order to be later distributed to various Russian penal camps.

#### 6. Categories Affected

Among the categories affected the first group was composed of the judges who were without exception thrown into the dungeon. This included even those who had never been in Russia during the war. This measure was said to have been completed by 18 November 1949. The next group was that of the administrative officers. Next came all prisoners who had been in the transportation corps, particularly railway station commanders, and the like. They all were charged with being "accomplices in the deportation of civilians." In addition, the following other individuals were affected: All former members of security units and of units for special assignments; all those who had had anything to do with Russian prisoners of war; all regimental artillery commanders without exception; the majority of infantry regimental commanders (it can be stated with certainty that only four of these were sent home with the shipment leaving on 22 December 1949); all naval officers; all members of SS-formations; all former police officers (except for a major who formerly worked for the Bavarian state police as instructor and who was repatriated on 22 December 1949); all members of police units which had operated in Russia, down to the grade of Oberwachtmeister (master sergeant); and finally all Wehrmacht legal officials of intermediate rank.

The Russians likewise retained all construction engineers, all "O.T." (Organization TODT) leaders and even one army postal unit commander. I do not know for sure whether all these men were thrown into dungeons. But it may be assumed that the majority of them met this fate.

It is characteristic that a Silesian priest who, to the best of my knowledge had served in the Army as a medical officer, and while a prisoner as an interpreter, was found guilty of crimes against humanity and sentenced to twenty-five years at hard labor.

An army chaplain, who had seen service in a security division, was prematurely discharged from the hospital, where he was under treatment for erysipelas, in order to be interrogated. Because of a heart ailment he collapsed three times, once after he had been put in the dungeon.

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The tremendous increase in the number of prisoners sent to the dungeon was attributed to the fact that Soviet authorities were now broadly applying Paragraph 17, 1 of the Russian penal code which penalizes any person who was an accomplice or who had knowledge of an offense. For lack of specific evidence, a defendant was charged with having been an accomplice, on the grounds that he was in the area in which a crime against humanity or a similar offense had occurred.

I would like to mention the following other incident which is characteristic. A major in a railway engineer unit was also sent to the dungeon, as were the prisoners who had been his subordinates. During an interrogation he pointed out that his superior had been sent home with the 17 November shipment. The interpreter, a friendly and good-natured woman, whom I knew by name, replied that times were different then.

It is absolutely certain that among those retained there is not a single individual who can be justly charged with an offense and still less with a crime.

#### 7. The Number of Convictions

a. In Camp No. 7270/3. It was impossible for me to obtain a reliable picture of the number of convictions.

All reports were unanimous in stating that as of 22 December 1949 300 field grade officers were detained in the "City Camp" (No. 7270/3).

It is noteworthy that the number should be exactly three hundred. From among this group six officers were allowed to go home with the 22 December shipment. However, in their stead six others allegedly were detained in the "Hornkaserne" (Horn barracks) in Frankfurt on the Oder. If the report is true, this was apparently done in order to bring the number to exactly three hundred again.

b. In the Other Russian Prisoner of War Camps. The men who came back to Germany with the 22 December shipment from Camp No. 7270/3 unanimously told me that en route they had met prisoners returning from other camps. Regardless of whether the latter came from the Murmansk, Ural, Moscow, Tiflis, Rostov or Odessa areas, they all agreed that in each camp approximately 50 to 60 percent of the German prisoners were still detained. Among them were not only men, but also women who had served as signal auxiliaries, for example, in headquarters and similar offices.

Not only Germans were detained, however, but also prisoners of war of other nationalities. It is an undisputed fact that about

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200 Spanish prisoners were held in the "City Camp" (No. 7270/3) as early as the summer of 1949. Before my repatriation they were transferred from the "Forest Camp" (No. 7270/16) to the "City Camp" — as far as I remember, in late September or early October — from there they were sent to the "Shaft Camp," whose number I do not know, although it is also near Borovich. After the departure of our repatriation train on 17 November 1949 these Spaniards were again sent back to the "City Camp." According to reliable reports, more Spanish prisoners of war were shipped from the Odessa area, and probably also from the Wjasma area, to the "City Camp" where they finally numbered about 250 men. It is interesting to note that among these Spaniards were not only those who had fought with the Germans in the "Blue Division" during World War II, but also veterans from both sides in the Spanish Civil War, that is to say, men who served Franco and men who served in Spain's Red Army.

I also believe that Austrians and Hungarians are still being held as prisoners in the USSR.

#### 8. Purpose

The purpose of detaining such a large number of prisoners can of course only be guessed. I share the general view that among the reasons mentioned in the first part of this report the decisive one seems to be Russia's desire to use prisoners for bargaining purposes.

This opinion is supported by the fact that identical measures were carried out simultaneously in all camps. In view of the over-centralization prevailing in the Soviet Union there can be no doubt that the wave of interrogations initiated in early December, as well as the detention and sentencing of prisoners of war was the result of orders issued by a central Moscow agency.

In this connection I should likewise suspect the following to be true.

The Soviet government had already once before postponed the final repatriation date of prisoners of war, namely from 31 December 1948 to 31 December 1949. For political reasons, probably to use them for bargaining purposes, it has again held back a large number of these men. In pursuit of its objectives the Soviet government officials simply ordered as many prisoners sentenced for war crimes as they desired to hold in Russia. Since it apparently now wishes to "save its face" for political reasons it cannot move up the repatriation deadline again. However, since the Soviet government had officially declared that it would repatriate all prisoners of war, except war criminals and those whose presence was required at trials before 31 December 1949, it proceeded to attain its purpose in an underhanded manner. According to the Soviet version, Russia

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has fully observed its pledge by repatriating all prisoners except those found guilty of war crimes. My suspicions are supported by the unprecedented speed, unprecedented for Russia, with which interrogation were carried on and sentences passed. It is obvious that the whole affair was to be finished before the end of the year. Another point in support of my suspicions is that an extraordinarily large interrogation commission numbering about thirty-two officers operated in the "City Camp" (No. 7270/3). This number was almost three times as large as that of any previous interrogation commission.

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